

These ham radios have long reach!

By DENNIS HERNET

Two Rivers Bureau Manager
TWO RIVERS — Did you ever get the feeling you were living through an episode of "Gilligan's Island?"

Picture if you will, three supposedly mature men, sitting huddled in a compact car parked behind WRTR radio station, shivering in 22-degree temperatures, attempting to talk to the astronauts of the Columbia space shuttle.

Here was Mark Heller, owner of the station, repeating his short wave (ham) call letters and a message over and over and over... "WB9WRT, Whiskey Bravo Nine Whiskey Radio Tango calling W4FLF."

And there was morning man Jeff Slager, laying across the back area of Heller's hatchback, on top of rubble Heller referred to as "my filing system," and yours truly...shivering.

W4FLF was Owen Garriott, one of the six astronauts aboard the shuttle.

The situation was all part of NASA-approved experiment in connection with this space shuttle flight whereby Garriott, an electrical engineer, would attempt to communicate with ham radio operators on earth.

Garriott used a two-pound transmitter-receiver with five watts of power, while Heller used a 25-watt transmitter-receiver on this end.

"Once we get beyond 16 miles up, there's no interference," Heller said.

What Heller also knew was that there would probably be thousands of persons attempting to make contact with the shuttle.

"Bearcat published an 800 number which could be called for information about the shuttle and how to make contact," Heller said. "I tried that number for three days and couldn't get through."

The first flyover where contact could be made was between 11:10 and 11:25 a.m. Wednesday, with the second opportunity coming between 7 and

7:15 p.m.

The 11:10 opportunity came as the shuttle flew southeast to northwest from Florida through the Ohio River Valley, with the second crossing coming over the western United States, in the proximity of Denver. The shuttle orbits about 200 miles above the earth.

At least three other persons in the Lakeshore Area attempted to reach the shuttle during the morning session.

All broadcasting was done between 144.91 and 145.09 on the ham radio operator's dial, while Garriot would respond at 145.55.

According to the plan published for the experiment, broadcasting from earth was to be done on the odd minutes, while the shuttle was to respond on the even numbered minutes.

But like all experiments of this nature, some people just did not get the message and were broadcasting during the receiving time or were broadcasting on the receiving channel.

John Glaser (WB9ESM) who is located near the old WCUB tower was working 144.91, while we had 144.95, and Jack Douville (WB9GTX) of Sheboygan, who came up to work from a wayside on Memorial Drive, had 144.99. Douville came up here because Two Rivers is more out into the lake than Sheboygan, thus there would be less interference and more of a chance to be heard.

We also made contact with Wally Shellingosky of Sheboygan.

Garriott was supposed to respond to all the numbers he could identify by repeating those numbers during his alternating minute on the air.

In addition, a tape recording was to be made of what Garriott heard and The American Radio Relay League was going to listen to that tape. It was going to send cards to all persons whose transmission were heard.

"It would really be great to get one of those cards," Heller



Staff photo by Dennis Hernet

CONTACT? — Mark Heller, owner of Two Rivers Radio Station WRTR, attempted to make contact with astronaut Owen Garriott during an experiment Wednesday morning.

commented.

Ham radio operators around the world would have five chances to contact the shuttle. Garriott was scheduled to be at his listening post one hour a day on five different days, or at five different times, according to the preliminary report.

Garriott is using his free time — not regular crew time — to work this experiment.

As far as the success of the local experiment...Gilligan talked with the astronauts.

Heller did not.

But it was worth it.

Just ask the three guys who shivered in that black compact car parked behind WRTR radio.